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Some Latin politicians cashing in on cocaine smuggling profits

By FRANK GREVE
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Profits from cocaine smuggling are promoting intrigue and turmoil in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, a wave of recent federal indictments suggests.

Politicians of every stripe allegedly are involved — leftist, rightist, in office, in exile, insurgent. Millions of dollars from narcotics trafficking, the U.S. indictments suggest, were intended to finance everything from arms purchases to an election campaign and a coup. Top Reagan administration officials say some of the money was intended to help finance the government of Nicaragua.

"The sums are insignificant in terms of the global narcotics trade, but they can have a huge impact in the Central American political arena, whether it be in elections, terrorism or insurgencies," warned Clyde D. Taylor, deputy assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters. "A \$10 million drug deal can buy a lot of insurgency and political action anywhere in Central America."

The region's growing significance to smugglers results, he said, from recent crackdowns in Colombia

and Mexico, plus improved U.S. surveillance of Caribbean air routes and sea lanes. The effect has been to channel more traffic into Central America, which smugglers had long considered too far off-course for runs to South Florida and less desirable than Mexico for refueling en route to other North American destinations.

Among the specific allegations, contained in a variety of government documents:

- Smugglers refueled at a military airfield in Nicaragua and sought to set up a cocaine processing laboratory there.

- Proceeds from an alleged \$10.3 million cocaine run were to finance an assassination plot against Honduran President Roberto Suazo Cordova.

- U.S. Customs agents nabbed a leading Salvadoran ultra-rightist and three companions with an unexplained \$5.9 million in cash a month before that country's election. All four showed up on Customs' list of narcotics trafficking suspects, according to a government affidavit filed in connection with the search of their chartered Sabreliner jet.

- Two U.S. Army Green Berets are charged with selling more than a ton of stolen Army mines, grenades, explosives and ammunition to federal agents they thought were Nicaraguan rebels, or contras. An affidavit filed in the case alleged that the Green Berets were to be paid in cash and cocaine. That sale took place in Indian River County, near Vero Beach.

For smuggling cases involving both arms and narcotics, the Reagan administration has coined a new term: "narcoterrorism." In the administration view — not persuasive to all drug experts — Nicaragua and Cuba have become narcoterrorism's leading sponsors in the Western Hemisphere.

Army Gen. Paul F. Gorman, for example, recently retired commander in chief of the U.S. Southern Command based in Panama, asserted in congressional testimony last month that Latin American drug traffickers "have reacted to pressure from lawful authorities in many countries by forming common cause with Marxist-Leninists, with anarchists and with international terrorists."

Supporting Gorman's view is the case of Federico Vaughan, described by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration as an aide to Nicaragua's powerful interior minister, Tomas Borge. (A Nicaraguan government spokesman denied last year that Vaughan was an aid to Borge, saying he had worked briefly for the Interior Ministry in the "services area.") According to an arrest warrant filed in Miami last July 18, Vaughan provided a military airstrip near Managua for refueling and shipment of 1,452 pounds of cocaine headed from Colombia to the United States.

The smuggling plane's pilot, a camera-equipped DEA informant, said Vaughan and reputed Colombian trafficker Pablo Escobar Gaviria ultimately intended to set up a new cocaine processing laboratory in Nicaragua. They wanted to fly cocaine base from Bolivia to Nicaragua, the informant said, then fly processed cocaine from Nicaragua to the United States and Europe.

In congressional testimony last week, Customs Commissioner William von Raab alleged that fugitive financier Robert Vesco, now believed to be living in Cuba, had financed the plot, for which Vaughan was to be paid \$1.5 million.

Vaughan, indicted in Miami on cocaine smuggling charges last January, is considered a fugitive.

A drug-smuggling case with contrasting anti-Communist overtones involves prominent supporters of Gen. Gustavo Alvarez, Honduras' pro-American armed forces commander exiled in March 1984 and now living in Miami.

Defendants include Gerard Latchinian, a Miami arms merchant who had won major contracts under Alvarez; Gen. Jose A. Bueso-Rosa, Alvarez's exiled former chief of staff, and Faiz J. Sikaffy, a Honduran importer-exporter and prominent Alvarez backer.

They sought drug money to pay off the triggerman in a scheme to assassinate President Suazo Cordoba "and replace him with a former general in the Honduran military services," according to affidavits filed with their indictments in Miami last November.

Alvarez was not indicted, or identified as involved in the scheme, in any public documents. The indictments charge Latchinian, Sikaffy, Bueso-Rosa, and five other defendants with conspiracy to commit murder for hire and smuggle into the United States \$10.3 million in cocaine to finance the plot.

Gen. Alvarez's nephew, Lt. Oscar Alvarez, is mentioned in the Green Beret munitions case. Sgts. Byron Carlisle and Keith Anderson, both stationed at Fort Bragg,

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N.C., were indicted last October and charged with selling stolen explosives, Claymore mines and grenades to undercover agents of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Lt. Alvarez was never criminally implicated or indicted in the case.

An affidavit filed in the case states that an undercover ATF agent and his informant persuaded Carlisle to introduce them to Lt. Alvarez, then assigned to Fort Bragg for training. Carlisle, a weapons and intelligence specialist, had met Lt. Alvarez in Honduras in 1982-83 when both were assigned to an elite counter-terrorist unit created under Gen. Alvarez and trained, according to published reports, by U.S. Army and CIA personnel.

Carlisle and Lt. Alvarez were friends and partners in a Honduran mahogany importing business, according to both men. The importing was done in the name of C-MAG, incorporated by Carlisle and Anderson in 1981. Operating as C-MAG, Carlisle and Anderson also rented a warehouse in September 1984. A government search warrant application charged that the warehouse was used to store stolen U.S. Army munitions.

Sgt. Anderson's lawyer, Stephen H. Broudy of Fort Lauderdale, contends his client was entrapped by the undercover ATF agents and believed that they were aiding contra rebels.

While not addressing the entrapment accusation, Indian River County Sheriff Tim Dobeck says the ATF agent told him he was posing as an arms buyer for the contras. Detective Perry Pisani, who worked with the ATF agent for several days before the October arrest in rural Indian River County, gives the same account.

Broudy seeks to question 44 Army personnel, four CIA employees and one FBI agent in his client's defense, according to court records.

Law enforcement sources acknowledge that figures of importance to the United States for diplomatic, military or intelligence reasons sometimes are allowed, in an informal way, to escape prosecution. "So many times, when you pick up on political figures in an investigation, the SAC [special agent in charge] gets scared to death," explained one Miami-based federal agent who asked not to be identified. "The SAC goes to headquarters and all of a sudden you've got a bunch of administrators on the case with their mentality and they back off on the investigation."

That may be one reason why Francisco Guirola, a Salvadoran businessman detained last Febru-

ary at an airfield near Corpus Christi, Texas, flashed a diplomatic passport and warned Customs agents that searching suitcases aboard his chartered Sabreliner would "cause trouble."

In the eight three-suiter canvas suitcases, Customs agents found 550 pounds of unmarked \$100 and \$20 bills totaling \$5.9 million.

Guirola's name, the names of three companions, and the tail numbers of their aircraft all turned up on the Customs computer index of suspected narcotics traffickers, according to a federal affidavit. "Guirola in March 1984 was reportedly involved in cocaine and arms smuggling in El Salvador and Guatemala," said the Customs search warrant application.

Guirola also served as an active fund-raiser for Roberto D'Aubuisson, the leader of El Salvador's far-right ARENA party and a reputed organizer of that country's death squad activities, according to a New Republic article.

Authors Craig Pyes and Laurie Becklund reported that Guirola carried, at the time of his arrest, Salvadoran official credentials. They were signed by D'Aubuisson and identified Guirola as a "special adviser to the Constituent Assembly."

Guirola and his aircraft carried no narcotics, and he faces no smuggling charges.